

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### **Bennett Steel, Inc.**

#### **Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence**

#### **Bennett Steel Embraces Change, Improves Productivity**

##### **Client Profile:**

Bennett Steel, located in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, is a 20-year-old fabrication business. The family-owned enterprise manufactures the steel (primarily beams, columns, and platforms) to create superstructures for large buildings. The company is one of eastern Oklahoma's largest steel fabricators with about 150 employees.

##### **Situation:**

Bennett Steel President Dave Bennett watched over the years as his productivity slipped and competition became increasingly fierce. He had a cursory knowledge of Lean Manufacturing but didn't think the concepts would work for his factory, which operates as a job shop. He worried, too, about his employees and did not want efficiencies to result in layoffs. For advice, Bennett turned to JC Stafford, a manufacturing extension agent with the Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence (The Alliance), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

##### **Solution:**

The Alliance's JC Stafford assured Bennett that Lean concepts would work and improve efficiency, even though it was a job shop. Stafford was confident, too, that new business would offset any need to layoff employees. While still skeptical, Bennett trusted Stafford and gave it a chance. A foreman attended a Lean 101 introductory course and brought some of the concepts back to the shop floor. He and his team started making a few changes. It improved production on certain projects. Bennett considered it a significant step but forged ahead and took the conversion company wide. All of Bennett's fabrication employees have been through Lean 101 and all have been through at least one implementation project.

Overall, production at Bennett Steel has increased by 20 percent and efficiency in the field by at least 20 percent. An unexpected result in changing the fabrication process was the improvements it made on the erection side of the business. "Previously, if we needed 50 certain types of pieces for a building we would make them all at one time," said Comptroller David Beyer. "Well, if they came up three short when they got to a certain part of the building, we'd have to stop what we were doing in the fabrication area and make those three pieces so we could finish the job. When they went to clean up the site after the project was finished, they'd find the missing pieces, which would just be wasted. But now, we make the pieces in the order they need them on site. There is no waste and no wasted time looking for pieces. That's an example of how Lean has made all of the jobs easier. We've eliminated those on-site frustrations and that's really important." Bennett recently established a full-time "Lean Champion" position, which coordinates all of the transformation activities. "Continuous improvement is definitely our motto," Beyer said. "Currently we have weekly meetings. We take an hour or two and put the ideas out on the table. And when we come up with something we think will improve production, we assign responsibility and implement it."

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**Results:**

- \* Increased production by 20 percent.
- \* Increased efficiency by 20 percent.
- \* Improved accountability.
- \* Improved efficiency of bidding system.

**Testimonial:**

"The Alliance has brought a lot of things to the table other than Lean. It is a great resource for new ideas, some we use and some we don't, but the advice is always appreciated. It's good for Oklahoma, and it makes us all stronger."

Dave Bennett, President